

Jacob left Laban to return home to Canaan as God had instructed him. God had enriched him and then protected him from Laban's pursuit and moved Laban to agree to a peaceful parting. As he progressed toward Canaan, he traveled down along a natural waterway, the Brook Jabbok,, that drops 4000 feet as it cuts through and drains the highlands of Gilead. It was the northern border of the Ammonites (Lot's descendants) separating them from the Amorite (Canaanite) tribes occupying some land east of Jordan. There he had two more supernatural encounters that seemed meant to encourage a closer relationship with the God that had been watching over him the past years.

First, at the head of the valley, God sent angels apparently to remind him of His faithfulness. Jacob took them to be the Lord's Host. "Host" is a term denoting an armed and trained army. Here was an invisible, invincible army traveling with and guarding Jacob. He named that place Mahanaim, "two camps," apparently his own and that of the Lord's host. This must have reminded him of the angels ascending and descending at Bethel two decades before, at the beginning of his journey away from home. What a welcoming committee. Apparently emboldened, though apparently not specifically directed by God to do so, he initiated contact with his brother Esau. (He had fled from him twenty years before after defrauding him of the firstborn's blessing.) He put together a plan to engage Esau with a carefully worded neutral conciliatory message. Note the absence of any hint of a confession or repentance for his unrighteous act against his brother. What was he thinking? Was it faith? Perhaps. God had told him to return promising to be with him. And God had shown him the angels by him apparently to remind him of this.

(Do the angels of God surround each of us as we walk on this earth? Few ever have actually seen them but they are there and have protected us and rescued us more times than we realize. When we pray for safety or other physical helps they are the ones whom God uses to respond to those prayers. That poke-along driver slowing our travel may sometimes be an angel keeping us from involvement in an accident or other danger ahead. How do we know?

Hebrews 1:14 Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?)

After his bold act in sending emissaries to Esau, they returned with unexpected and disquieting news. Esau was coming to meet him—with 400 men. Now he was afraid, and immediately took actions to deflect the blow if Esau was hostile. Then, we finally read, Jacob prayed. Sometimes we also need a jolt to bring us to our knees in prayer. Too bad it took that, but Jacob's prayer was touchingly humble, intimate, thankful and dependant. He leveled with God about his fears (we can too). He cited God's promise of a vast nation of descendants—to be as the sand of the sea—as the reason He should defend him and his family. The specific promise to Jacob (Genesis 28:14) was that his descendants would be as the dust of the earth, including

every human ever born, wider in scope than even the Jewish and the Gentile nations. The promise specifically referring to the sand of the sea (Israel) was to Abraham (Genesis 22:17), but Jacob knew it.

Jacob then made up an extravagant "gift" in an attempt to appease Esau. He sent it on its way in five droves, each drove led by a trusted servant and tended by servants. Each leader was given a message to recite promising Jacob was coming behind. Then Jacob helped his immediate family safely cross the Jabbok torrent. That done, Jacob remained behind for the night. Why? In case Esau attacked in the night he might personally survive???

But God used the opportunity to attack him instead. God Himself engaged Jacob in an all night wrestling match. Jacob was tough and persistent. He wasn't about to yield anything to this stranger. At some point he came to the realization this was no ordinary man. Even when the man told him to let go he would not. Even when the man miraculously disabled him, he would not let go but demanded a blessing. He realized this was not simply an angel but none other than God Himself. His blessing was in the form of a name change, from "**Jacob**"—"heel grabber" or "*supplanter*," to "**Israel**,"—"A **PRINCE OF GOD**." The first instance he is called by that name in the text is in verse 32 referring to a custom of the "children of Israel" memorializing his disablement. (This verse apparently is a note added by Moses and is the first reference to the "Children of Israel.") Jacob isn't personally referred to as "Israel" immediately in the narrative but he did use it later to name an altar he built. Jacob's encounter with God at Peniel is referred to 1000 years later by the prophet Hosea (Hosea 12:1-6). There the *heel grabber's* **tenacity**, both in the womb and by the brook about 100 years later, are cited and commended. Late in their history the errant tribes of the divided nations of Judah and Israel needed exhortation to quickly return to the Lord. They needed simply to cling to Him with the tenacity of their patriarch father Jacob when disabled he clung to the Wrestler. They ignored it and soon were carried away out of the land by the Assyrians. They have yet to reappear as a recognizable people. Today, in these last days of the Church on earth, we need to take heed to the times and cling mightily to the Lord as Jacob did at Peniel ("face of God").

1Thessalonians 5 1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. 5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. Etc.

By Ronald Canner, November 3, 2010